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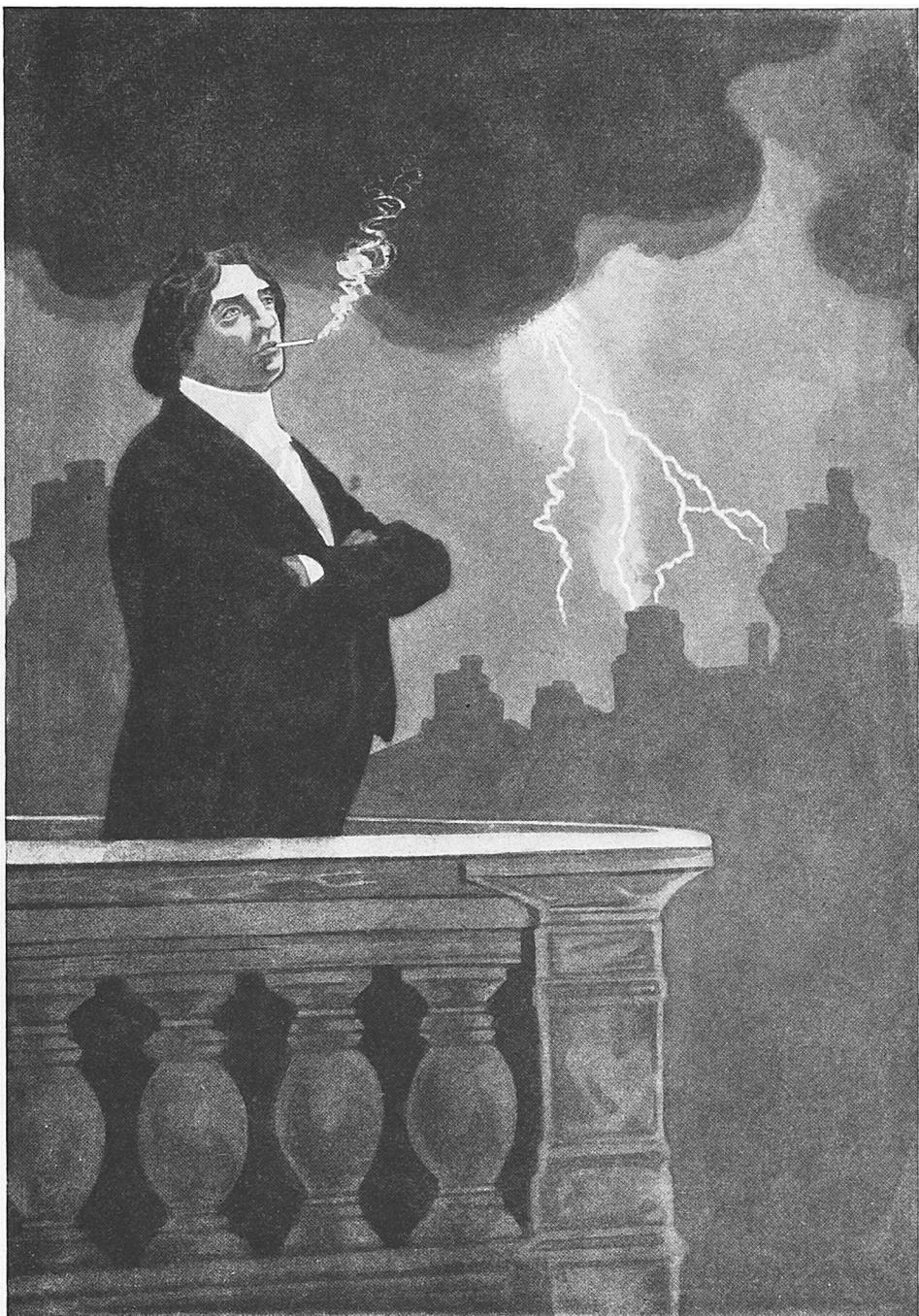
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Oscar Wilde by Kyd (*Unpublished*)

Courtesy of Mr. Brentano

Oscar Wilde Is Alive!

By ARTHUR CRAVAN

[This translation from the French, which does not do justice to the original, is more of a *raccordage* than a translation.—*E. C.*]

It was the night of the twenty-third of March, nineteen thirteen. And if I am going to give minute details on my state of soul this latter-end of winter evening, it is because these hours were the most memorable of my life. I wish also to show the strangenesses of my character, seat of my inconsistencies; my detestable nature, which, nevertheless, I would not exchange for any other, even though it has always hindered me from following a line of conduct; for it makes me sometimes honest, sometimes deceitful, and vain and modest, coarse or distinguished. I want to make you guess them, that you may not detest me, as, presently, you will perhaps feel tempted to do on reading me.

It was the night of the twenty-third of March, nineteen thirteen. Without doubt we are not physically alike, my legs probably are much longer than yours, and my head, highly perched as it is, is happily balanced; our chest measurement differs also, which, probably, will prevent you from weeping and laughing with me.

It was the night of the twenty-third of March, nineteen thirteen. It rained. Ten o'clock had already struck. I was reposing, dressed, on my bed, and had not taken care to light the lamp, for that evening I felt myself flag before such a great effort. I was frightfully bored. I would say: "Ah, Paris, how I bear you hatred! What are you doing in this city? Ah! that's right! No doubt you think you will succeed! Why twenty years are necessary for that, my poor man, and if you attain to fame you will then be ugly as a man. I shall never understand how Victor Hugo could, for forty years, pursue his labors. All literature is: ta, ta, ta, ta, ta, ta. Oh, damn it!"—I become terribly coarse at such moments—and yet I feel that I do not surpass the limits, for I stifle in spite of it all. Nevertheless, I aspire to success, for I feel I should droll know what uses to make of it, and would find it amusing to be famous; but how manage to take myself seriously? To think that, given we exist, we do not laugh continuously. But—another perplexity—I also wish to lead the marvelous life of the *raté*. And as sadness with me is always mingled with pleasantries, it was "Oh la la's" quickly followed by "tra la la's!"

I thought too: I am spending my capital. Great! I can guess what my troubles will be when, towards forty, I shall see myself, from every point of view, ruined. "Ohé" I would immediately add as a sort of conclusion to these little verses; for it was necessary that I should laugh on. Seeking some amusement, I tried to rhyme, but inspiration, ever ready to tease the will at a thousand turns, completely failed me. By force of racking my brains, I found this quatrain—of a commonplace irony which quickly disgusted me:

J'étais couché sur mes draps,
Comme un lion sur le sable,
Et, pour effet admirable,
Je laissais pendre mon bras.

Incapable of originality, and not renouncing my efforts to create, I sought to add lustre to ancient poems, forgetting that verse is an incorrigible infant! Naturally I had not any more success: everything remained mediocre. At last—ultimate extravagance—I imagined the *prosopoème*, a thing of the future, the execution of which, moreover, I put off to the happy—and how lamentable—days of inspiration. The idea in view was of a piece begun in prose which, through insensible iterations—rhyme—at first remote then closing in more and more, should give birth to pure poetry.

Then I relapsed into my sad thoughts.

What hurt me most was that I was still in Paris, too weak to leave it; that I had an apartment and even furniture—at that moment I could have burnt the house down—that I was in Paris though lions and giraffes exist; and I thought that science herself had begotten her mammoths, and that we already saw naught but elephants; and that in a thousand years the reunion of all the machines in the world would cause no more noise than: "scs, scs, scs." This "scs, scs, scs," enlivened me, feebly. I am here, on this bed, like a sluggard; not that it displeases me to be a terrible loafer; but I hate to remain *for long* only that, when our epoch is the most favorable to men of enterprise and to sharpers; I, to whom an air on the violin suffices to awaken a madness for life; I who could kill myself through pleasure; die of love for all women; who weep all cities, I am here, *because life has no solution*. I can faire la fête in Montmartre and a thousand eccentricities, since I need them; I can be pensive, physically; moul't step by step into sailor, gardener or barber; but, if I want to savour the voluptuousnesses of the priest, I must bestow a lustrum on my forty years' existence, and lose incalculable pleasures, during the time I must remain solely chaste. I, who dream myself even amid catastrophes, I say that man is only so unfortunate because a thousand souls inhabit a single body.

It was the night of the twenty-third of March, nineteen thirteen. At times I could hear a tug-boat whistle, and would inwardly say: "Why are you so poetic, since you go no farther than Rouen, and do not run any danger? Ah! let me laugh, laugh, but truly laugh, like Jack Johnson!"

No doubt I had, that evening, the soul of a man deceived, for nobody, I am certain, since I have never formed a friend, nobody has loved as much as I: each flower transforms me into a butterfly; more than an ewe, to trample on the grass ravishes me; the air, oh, the air! for entire afternoons have I not occupied myself in breathing? On nearing the sea, does not my heart dance like a buoy? and from the moment I cleave the waves my organism is that of a fish. Amid nature, I feel myself leafy; my hair is green and my blood carries green; often, I adore a pebble; the angelus is dear to me; and I love to listen to memory when it whistles plaintively.

I had slipped into my stomach, and must have begun to fall into a fairy-like state; for my digestive tube was suggestive; my mad cells danced; and my shoes seemed to me miraculous. What incites me still more to think thus, is that at that moment I remarked the feeble noise of a bell, the ordinary timbre of which, seemingly, diffused itself through all my members; like some marvelous liquid. I arose slowly and, precipitately, went to open, joyous at such an unexpected diversion. I pulled to the door; an immense man stood before me.

—Monsieur Lloyd?

—That is me, said I; will you please come in.

—And the stranger trod over my doorstep with the magical airs of a queen or a pigeon.

—I am going to light up . . . pardon me for receiving you thus. . . . I was alone, and . . .

—No, no, no; please, don't in any way trouble yourself.

I insisted.

—Once again, I pray you, said the stranger, receive me in the dark.

Amused, I offered him an arm-chair, and faced him. Immediately he began:

—Can your ears listen to things unheard-of?

—Pardon me, I stammered, pardon me, a little shocked. I have not quite understood.

I said, "Can your ears listen to things unheard-of?"

This time, I simply said: yes.

Then, after some moments, he whom I thought a stranger said: "I am Sebastian Melmoth."

Never shall I be able to render what passed within me: in a

sudden and total self-suppression, I wanted to fall on him and clasp his neck, to embrace him like a mistress, give him to eat and to drink, put him to bed, dress him, become his procurer, in short, to draw all my money from the bank and fill his pockets. The only words I could succeed in articulating to sum up my innumerable sentiments were: "Oscar Wilde! Oscar Wilde!" The latter understood my trouble and my love, and murmured: "Dear Fabian." To hear myself named thus familiarly and tenderly touched me to the point of tears. Then, my mood changing, I inhaled, like an exquisite perfume, the delight of being one of the actors in a unique situation.

The moment after, a mad curiosity spurred me to wish I might distinguish him in the darkness. And, carried away by passion, I did not feel it embarrassing to say: "Oscar Wilde, I should like to see you; let me light this room."

"Do so," he answered me in a very soft voice.

I went therefore into a neighboring room to find the lamp, but, at its weight, I knew it to be empty; and it was with a candle that I returned to my uncle.

I immediately looked on Wilde; an old man with white beard and hair, that was he!

An unutterable pain strangled me. Though I had often, in idleness, calculated the age that Wilde should have today, the only image that enchanted me, repudiating even that of the mature man, was that which disclosed him young and triumphant. What! To have been poet and youth, noble and rich, and be no longer more than old and sad. Destiny! was it possible? Forcing back my tears and approaching him, I embraced him! I ardently kissed his cheek; then I rested my blonde hair on his snowy head, and for a long, long time, I sobbed.

Poor Wilde did not thrust me from him; on the contrary, my head was even softly encircled by his arm; and he pressed me against him. He said nothing, only, once or twice, I heard him murmur: "Oh, my God! oh, my God!" Also, "God has been terrible!" By some strange aberration of the heart, this last word, pronounced with a strong English accent, gave me—though still plunged in my atrocious anguish—a diabolical desire to laugh; and this all the more that, at the same second, a hot tear of Wilde's rolled on my wrist; which gave rise in me to this horrible sally: "The captain's tear!" This jest restored my serenity, and hypocritically detaching myself from Wilde, I went to re-seat myself in front of him.

To be Continued.